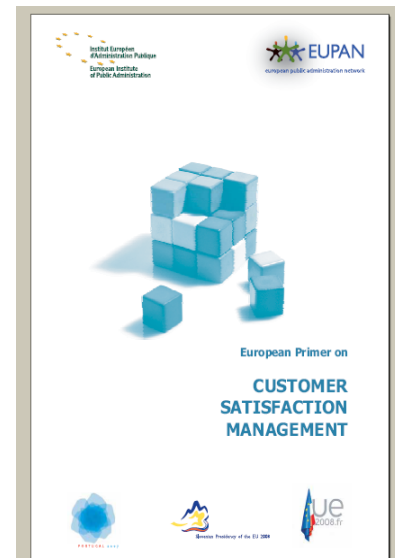


Interview to Patrick Staes and Nick Thijs, from the European Institute for Public Administration – EIPA who have coordinated, within the European Public Administration Network, the Primer on Customer Satisfaction Management

1. The European primer on CSM was presented during the last Fifth Quality Conference in Paris. It is the result, on the customer satisfaction topic, of the work of the EUPAN network. Could you tell us more about the Primer background and its origins?



For many years the topic of customer satisfaction has been on the EUPAN agenda, in recent years this has gained rapidly. During the Austrian (first half 2006), Finnish (second half 2006) and German (first half 2007) Presidencies of the EU, initiatives were taken to address many aspects of customer satisfaction in the Customer Satisfaction Expert Group and many good practices all over Europe were collected. Based on these good practices, the Expert Group concluded that many interesting and valuable things could be done with these good practices and that the field of customer satisfaction was too large and too important to focus attention in the first place only on customer satisfaction surveys and measurement. “*Measuring*” satisfaction is one thing; “*managing*” satisfaction is another and should be the aim. The aim of building “a European Primer on Customer Satisfaction Management” was born.

This broader idea was elaborated in a first phase during the Expert group meetings under the Portuguese Presidency (second half 2007), and also financed by the Portuguese. The European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA-Maastricht) was asked to support the work in this Expert Group. A UK paper ‘*The Primer on Customer Insight*’ (Cabinet Office, 2006) served as a basic document. This UK publication explains the relevance of customer focus and the role(s) citizens/customers play in public sector management. During the meetings of the Expert Group under the Slovenian (first half of 2008) and the French Presidency (second half of 2008) this document was rewritten in a European version, giving an overview of different methods and techniques around customer insight including examining the importance of customer needs, expectations and satisfaction. It gathers a lot of information that is already available on this topic and gives practical examples and cases from public sector organisations all over Europe. This publication does not aim to be explorative or innovative in nature, but rather to give an overview and integrate existing insights.

The work in this field and the final version of the Primer were presented at the 5th European Quality Conference, hosted by the French EU Presidency, in Paris on 20-22 October 2008. Different language versions (English, French, Polish, Norwegian and German) are already created.

2. Customer Satisfaction is not a new issue, also at the European level. Why, in your opinion, it is important to work on this topic and, to this extent, which could be the added value proposed by the Primer?

Governments have to be more responsive to society's needs and demands. Public sector organisations are being reformed in order to provide better, faster and more services. The citizen/customer has a prominent place in these reforms.

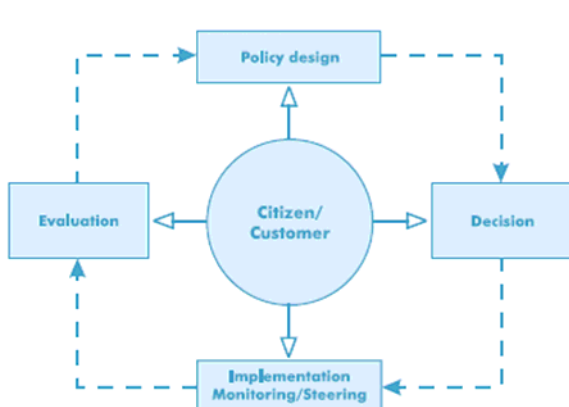
Successful organisations use customer needs and expectations as a starting point; developing proposals around their customers' needs and expectations, also meeting other corporate imperatives. Managing satisfaction therefore has to do with managing services and/or products, but also with managing expectations and perceptions of the citizen/customer. Measuring satisfaction seems to be just one element in this overall satisfaction management approach.

The consultation of citizens forms a crucial input throughout the policy and management cycle. Consultation should be defined as a two-way relationship, where government talks to citizens/customers and citizens/customers provide feedback to government. It is based on the prior definition by government of the issue on which citizens'/customers' views are being sought and requires the provision of information. The citizen/customer no longer comes in the picture only at the end but at all stages and steps of the policy and service delivery. Therefore, measuring citizen/customer satisfaction is only one stage, the final stage. The input of the citizens/customers in all their roles and at all stages of the cycle has to be taken into account. This is what can be defined as Customer Satisfaction Management.

This publication explains the relevance of customer focus and the role(s) that citizens/customers play in public sector management. We hope that this publication the place and the role of citizens/customers in customer satisfaction management is more clear, and public service organisations all over Europe have some practical guidelines on the way to Customer Satisfaction Management.

3. The primer conveys a remarkable change on the citizens' role in the public services cycle. This could be addressed as "the co-model". What does this definition mean?

Traditionally, the political leaders determine what services are to be provided, on what terms and to whom; and civil servants and professionals subsequently organise and deliver the services. The role of the citizens is largely passive.



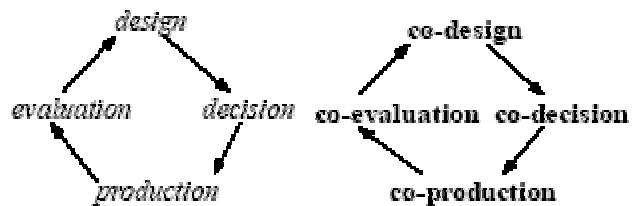
In the new setting however, the range of actors involved – institutionally or on an *ad hoc* basis – in the production, delivery and evaluation of public services has grown and the role of the citizen has become more and more active. This changing role of citizen/customers of public services has an impact on the policy and management cycle as a whole. Traditionally, the policy and management cycle is dominated and controlled by politicians and administrators. Now, citizens-customers are (should be) increasingly involved in this policy and management cycle at different stages (design, decision, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation) as is shown in the figure below.

Strategies of participation and knowledge on needs and performance are essential. This implies that public agencies evolve from a closed, self-centred service provider to an open networking organisation which the public can trust. This occurs through transparent processes and accountability; through democratic dialogue, from an internal (resources and activities) focus

to an external (output and outcome) focus; and from a classical-design-decision-production-evaluation cycle to an involvement of stakeholders in general, and citizens (as customers) in particular at each and every stage of this cycle. Citizens/customers become co-designers, co-deciders, co-producers and co-evaluators.

The traditional orientation in the public sector is in principle very internal and supply driven. Public sector organisations are closed systems, or even 'black boxes', where the design of policies and service delivery, the related decisions taken, the production and delivery of services, and the evaluation by definition, all depend upon internal relationships. There were several reasons why this appeared to be a good solution. Legal requirements emphasised equal, impartial treatment of citizens. Only a distant approach was supposed to guarantee this. Furthermore, professionals and experts/bureaucrats had the necessary expertise about needs, priorities, resources and policies that could remedy certain problems.

However, complex needs in an increasingly heterogeneous society, the demand for increased transparency, changing perceptions of the legitimacy of governments, and the need to get citizens involved resulted in an opening up of the 'black box' to citizens.



4. What about the large best practices' collection, from all Member States, which has been featured in the Primer? Do you think these examples could be useful for other public administrations?

Certainly. Showing the dynamic on this topic all over Europe is one of the aims of the publication. It is interesting to find that public administration in many countries faces the same problems and needs to tackle the same issues. Therefore why should public administrations need to (re-)invent the wheel each time again, while there is so much to learn from each other, both on European as on a national level. This issue is underdeveloped in most administrative cultures and also needs to be stimulated and facilitated by central ministries.

The Primer document also points on some very innovative cases on the other hand. The cases and practices illustrate the broader picture on how to deal with citizen/customers and how to involve them in an in-depth way.

5. Could you please give us some examples on how a manager/employee of an Italian public administration could use the Primer?

The Primer document is certainly not a practical guideline on an operational level. It is written to be a strategic document, like "an eye-opener", setting the scenery on the topic of customer satisfaction and the involvement of citizen/customers. Although it gives also practical information on "the how to questions" and give an overview of possible techniques and instruments.

On a policy level this document should lead to a reflection on the place and the role of citizens/customers in relation to public administrations. It should be used in defining a vision in this respect. What is the image we as public administration want to have? How do we want to be seen? How do we take up our core tasks in delivering and carrying out the things we need to do? Do we do these things "in a good way", meaning are we efficient, delivering quality? This has to do with the classical satisfaction thinking. But, we want to go broader. On a policy, strategic and management level we should ask ourselves the question "are we doing the

good things”? Therefore we need more than only measuring satisfaction, we also need to empower citizen/customers, discussing with them, involving them in the different stages. This is not the easiest way, certainly not. But if we really want to come to a close partnership, having mutual responsibilities and become a strong public sector, which is trusted, appreciated and supported, this is the only way.

We hope that through this publication people in public administration feel inspired and start thinking and about this important issue.

Patrick Staes is senior counsel at the Federal Public Service Personal & Organisation in Belgium and national seconded at EIPA since 2004. He is responsible for the CAF Resource Centre at EIPA that supports the implementation of the CAF in Europe by research, training, coaching and networking. Since 2000 he is member of the Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG), an expert group of the directors general of the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN). He obtained a degree on History (1982) and Public management (1989) at the

Catholic University of Leuven. He published on the Belgian Citizen Charter (1998), was co-organisier of the Belgian Quality Conferences in 2001, 2003 and 2005 and wrote several articles public quality. He has experience in the application of the CAF at local, regional, national and international level. He is secretary-general of the Belgian Institute Public administration.



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Nick Thijs joined EIPA on 1 January 2007 Researcher in the Unit on Public Management and Comparative Public Administration, where he is working in the European CAF Resource Centre. He obtained a Master's degree in political sciences, specialising in public

administration and public management, from the University of Leuven (BE). As a former researcher at the Public Management Institute at the University of Leuven he was responsible for the research on public-sector quality management, organisational development, and change management. He was responsible for training and education in the field of public-sector quality management, coordinated the Public Management Programme for Federal Civil Servants (a long-term training programme for high potentials). He is a member of the editorial board of the Flemish Journal of Public Management and secretary of the Flemish Association for Public Administration. In his position in EIPA his fields of specialisation include: public management reform; comparative public administration; public sector quality management; quality models and techniques (Common Assessment Framework – CAF) and Customer Satisfaction Management.